

Changing the lives of children with disabilities in rural Uganda

Global Giving report Feb 2016

In December 2015, Kyaninga Child Development Centre successfully completed the Global Challenge where we were raising money to help reach 100 children with disabilities living in extreme poverty. Thanks to the generous donations given I am happy to share with you the stories of 2 children that we have already been able to help.

Joseph is a 17-year-old boy who was referred to us by one of our partner organisations who work in his community. He was born healthy but upon receiving his polio vaccination at the age of 4 he had a strong adverse reaction, which left him severely disabled with no movement in his arms or legs.

Due to a lack of rehabilitation services available at the time and poor understanding of disability amongst his family, his only form of care was to be lain on a mattress in the corner of the room. Over the years he became fixed into a curled-up position, with only a little hand and elbow movement in his right arm, but he is able to speak and understands well. When we met him he was curled up on a mattress on the floor with his family standing over him. His arms and legs have become extremely stiff from 12 years of no movement and unfortunately it will be difficult to reverse. However, it was important for him to be able to interact better with his family so we suggested sitting him in a chair every day so that he was at eye level with them.

We also taught his family about the importance of passive movements to reduce the stiffness in his limbs and also to change his position from lying to sitting regularly to prevent further problems. When we returned a couple of weeks later we were happy to find him sitting in a chair and he told us that although he gets uncomfortable because of his stiffness, he enjoys being able to see his family and interact with them better. He even sits up with them while they have their meals, though currently he is unable to feed himself.

We have also noticed an increase in the movement he has in his right hand and arm and there is also a little movement appearing in his left as well. We gave him activities to practice while he is sitting in his chair and, because of the donations we received, we were able to provide a made to measure chair for him so that he can be more comfortable. We will continue to see Joseph on a regular basis to develop the movement that he has with an aim that he will one day be able to feed himself.

In December 2015, we conducted one of our community outreach assessment days. The team consisting of physiotherapists, occupational therapists and a doctor assessed over 50 children with disabilities. One of the children that were brought for assessment was Davis, a 5-year-old boy with developmental delay. His mother was concerned that he was unable to walk, had poor speech and some learning impairment. They had never taken him to the hospital to find answers for his disabilities because they couldn't afford the transport to get there even though it was less than 10km from their home. On top of that, they also were also unaware that there was anything that could be done anyway.

During their assessment Davis was found to be able to stand with minimal support and had good upper limb function. He is unable to speak but can understand what is said to him. He communicates by pointing only but enjoys a good laugh!!! We advised his family to work on muscle strengthening exercises for his legs and trunk and to practice standing every day. We also decided to build him a set of parallel bars in his garden so that he can practice standing and walking as often as possible. We will also make him a walker so that as he gets stronger he is able to walk further around the house and gardens.

His Mum was extremely grateful for the provision of therapy services and the parallel bars, and has already noticed improvements in her son. She said that "even her own family members have never put as much effort as to think of supporting her and her family like this, with such a useful aid".

There are many children that we see each week with stories similar to these, often the diagnosis is different but the outcomes are the same: A loss of movement, a loss of independence, reliance on family and inability to interact with family and friends. Our goals are often similar; educate the family on the causes of disability; that it is not witchcraft, the devil, contagious, or a curse, and to reinstate hope and a belief that the child can improve with intervention. We look to strengthen their mobility skills such as sitting and walking, improve on their personal skills such as bathing, feeding, toileting, and interacting with family and friends, and even being enrolled into school.

All of this is made possible through the support we receive and so a big Thank You must be said for helping us to achieve these goals!

